

ASSOCIATION MEN

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*This was the youth that knew to swing
The ax—since thus would Freedom
train
Her son—and made the forest ring,
And drove the wedge, and toiled
again.*

*A type that Nature wills to plan
But once in all a people's years.*



BEFORE A MAN IS TWENTY-ONE—President C. A. Richmond—LINCOLN—THE RAIL SPLITTER—
Dr. W. E. Barton—LOAFER OR LEADER—Dean Clark—WHY MOST MEN HAVE SOME BAD
HABITS—An Arena Talk—WITH OR WITHOUT—Will M. Cressy—BIG-MAN TALK—R. W. Kauffman

LINCOLN, THE YOUNG RAIL-SPLITTER

BY WILLIAM E. BARTON, Author of "The Soul of Abraham Lincoln."

ABRAHAM LINCOLN was elected president of the United States largely because he was a rail-splitter. But he had not split a rail for nearly thirty years. His rail-splitting had been done while he was a young man; and little did he think when he did it that it would help to make him President. That he had some hope or dream that he might one day be President, there is abundant proof. Almost every American boy thinks of the presidency as a pleasant possibility; Lincoln had a more definite premonition, and so had Mrs. Lincoln. But neither of them thought of rail-splitting as having any bearing upon the event.

Lincoln's splitting of rails, and his subsequent election to the presidency, may be used to illustrate any one of many themes; but the lesson which is writ large upon the face of the story is that the faithful doing of any duty in boyhood or manhood, may have an important bearing upon events remote and of great significance.

Lincoln's rail-splitting began early. When he was seven years of age his parents removed from Kentucky to Indiana, and made their home in a dense forest. The gun and the ax were the two most essential implements of the frontiersman who essayed to make a home in that environment. Lincoln never had much fondness for a gun. One day a flock of wild turkeys alighted in the clearing, and he thrust a rifle between the cracks of the cabin and shot a turkey. He was able to say in 1860 that he never since had "pulled a trigger on any larger game." Hunting was one of the recognized sports of frontier life, but he appears to have had little share in it. The gun was not his favorite implement; that place in his affections was held by the ax.

Railed to the Whitehouse

THE RAILS that elected Lincoln to the presidency were old and moss-grown when called into service for their share in the glory of the campaign. For thirty years they had done service as part of a fence. They were, as the placard which they bore attested, "Two rails from a lot of 3,000 made in 1830 by John Hanks and Abe Lincoln." Some of those 3,000 rails were locust and some were walnut. They were rived in Macon County, Illinois, about ten miles from Decatur. But for those rails, it is very unlikely that Abraham Lincoln would ever have been nominated for the presidency.

When the Campaign of 1860 began, Abraham Lincoln was little known outside his own State of Illinois, and was far from being the unanimous choice even of that State for the presidency. He had won wide recognition by his debates with Stephen A. Douglass, and his Cooper Union speech had introduced him to New York City. But few comparatively of the men who were to nominate the Republican candidate for president had seriously considered him as the logical candidate. Illinois itself was divided. The northern part of the state was largely for Seward, and the southern part for Lincoln. But the northern part of the state, which included the growing and ambitious

city of Chicago, where the convention was to be held, was highly important in an election such as was impending. Lincoln wrote to his Chicago friends saying that while it would not hurt him greatly not to receive the nomination of the National Convention, it would hurt him not to receive the support of his own state. The state convention was held in Decatur, May 9 and 10, and Lincoln was present. He told his friends that he was rather too much of a candidate to be present and not quite enough of a candidate to justify him in staying away. Whether he was to be nominated in Chicago did not depend wholly upon whether he secured the support of his own state convention, for it was wholly possible to succeed in the state meeting and fail in the national assembly; but it was certain that if he failed at Decatur to secure the united backing of his own state, the presentation of his name at

Chicago would merely align him with the "favorite sons" who were to have their names presented by their own home delegations without any real expectation of success. If he was to have any hope of success in Chicago, he simply must succeed at Decatur.

When the State Convention assembled at Decatur, Richard J. Oglesby planned and executed a movement which delighted the gathering. He asked permission to permit "an old Democrat" to bring in something which he had to present to the convention. Permission was granted, and John Hanks and another man came in, bearing two rails, with a placard proclaiming Abraham Lincoln "the rail candidate." The convention went wild, as conventions do at such times. I have attended a good many national political conventions, and they love an incident that enables them to reach a decision without too much thinking. The Decatur convention called for Lincoln, and Lincoln was not far away. He was invited to a seat on the platform, and in taking it said that he did not know whether he made those particular rails or not; he thought they were little credit to their maker, and that he could make better ones.

From Childhood Lincoln Swung an Ax

THE RAILS had done their work. The convention went solidly for Lincoln, and sent its delegation so instructed to the Chicago convention which met the following week. Backed solidly by the state of Illinois, Lincoln won the nomination in a convention which was at the outset more than two-thirds against him. But for the solid Illinois delegation he would not have won in Chicago; but for the rails, he would hardly have won the solid Illinois delegation.

So much for the rails at the height of his career. Lincoln in a short autobiography which he wrote with his own hand for John Locke Scripps, and whose original pages I handled only a few weeks ago, commented on the rails, of which so much had recently been said and added that those were far from being the first or the last rails which Abraham Lincoln split.

They were nearer the last than the first. He had been chopping down trees and splitting rails almost from the day his father removed to Indiana, when Abraham was seven years old. This is Lincoln's own narrative of his father's removal to Indiana and the events occurring shortly afterward:

"He settled in an unbroken forest, and the clearing away of surplus wood was the great task ahead. Abraham, though very young, was large for his age, and had an ax put into his hands at once; and from that until within his twenty-third year he was almost constantly handling that most useful instrument—less, of course, in plowing and harvesting seasons. At this place Abraham took an early start as a hunter, which was never much improved afterwards. A few days before the completion of his eighth year, in the absence of his father, a flock of wild turkeys approached the new log cabin, and Abraham, with a rifle gun, standing inside, shot through a crack and killed one of them. He has never since pulled a trigger on any larger game."

ASSOCIATION MEN



THE RAIL SPLITTER
In the Art Institute Chicago

From the time he was eight, then, until he was past twenty-two, Lincoln was a constant wood-chopper and rail-splitter? Rails had to be, not so much to fence the live-stock in as to keep them out. Cattle and horses pastured free, and the hogs ran wild in the woods, with ear-marks to protect them against the desire of neighbors for fresh pork. Fenced rails had to be, if there was to be corn for bread.

A Man in Stature at Seventeen

LINCOLN grew rapidly. He had attained his full growth before he was seventeen. He had a man's stature and a man's strength, and he gave himself to a man's heavy toil. Hard, physical labor was demanded of him, and he met the demand.

One result of this labor was that Lincoln became a man of mighty physical strength. He needed all the strength he had or could obtain, for the years that followed made heavy inroads on his reserve powers. Without his strong muscular development, he could hardly have endured the strain of the days that awaited his rise to national fame.

We are well certified that Lincoln had no inordinate love of toil. He did not enjoy work for the sake of work. He said in after years that Thomas Lincoln, his father, taught him to work, but never taught him to love his work. And the work he had to do was arduous and for the most part uninspiring. *But he did it, and it helped to make a man of him. No man gets far in life by selecting the kinds of work which he enjoys doing and letting all the rest go by. Much of Lincoln's boyhood toil was sheer drudgery; but he did it.*

Lincoln was doing other things in those days beside splitting rails. He was saving pine-knots for the evening fire, that he might stretch himself on the hearth-stone and read. He was borrowing books and reading and re-reading them. The library was a choice one. It contained, first of all, the Bible, then Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, Aesop's Fables, Weems' Life of George Washington, Robinson Crusoe, and a History of the United States. He could hardly have fallen upon a better collection. Lincoln read these books, and borrowed others. He disciplined mind and body. He learned the meanings of words. He cultivated a clear English style. He read and he wrote and he thought and he spoke. He was cultivating to the best of his ability all his talents of body and brain.

It required all of this preparation to make Abraham Lincoln the boy he was and the man he subsequently became. No one could have predicted the spectacular part which the rails were to have in the matter. But that is immaterial. Lincoln did all the things that he knew how to do that prepared him adequately for life. He did the easy things and the hard ones; he cultivated his strength of body and of brain. And on the day when old John Hanks came into the convention at Decatur with the two old rails, the hour of destiny had struck for Abraham Lincoln and the world.

Hailed as the Rail Splitter President

WE SHOULD wholly lose the value of this narrative if we concluded that all that made Abraham Lincoln President was the happy accident or clever plan by which Dick Oglesby and John

Hanks stampeded the Decatur convention. Their work had its share in the result. But the convention was not so irrational as it might appear. Those two old fence rails bore their mute testimony to a life of toil and self-development, and gave promise of large success to the man who already had risen from the condition of a rail-splitter to be one of the nation's foremost men.

Those rails were a way-mark showing how far Abraham Lincoln had already journeyed on the road toward success, and how far he still was likely to go was left for the inference of the delegates and voters. Nor did Lincoln disappoint their hopes or those of the nation. Lincoln justified the enthusiasm of the convention that hailed him as a rail-splitter, and the larger one that named him as their candidate for the nation's highest office. The man who splits rails and does it well; the man who faces his own task, whatever it be, with strong determination to perform his duty faithfully, will find the products of his work, in one shape or another, rising in later years to assure his fellows of his capacity, fidelity and power.

The country made no mistake in choosing a rail-splitter as its President. There are other tasks, as humble,

as arduous, as unrelated in appearance, by which young men are now being prepared for heavy and glorious responsibilities in coming years.



LINCOLN, THE LAWYER

Painted and presented the Southern Training Institute by Mrs. H. K. Bush-Brown.

